The Progressive Review

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Making South Central LA a good place to live

Sometimes it's the question that's wrong. In the thousands of words pouring out about the LA uprising you can easily search in vain for one sentence implying that anyone -- victim, participant or would-be reconstructionist -- has any real hope for our inner cities other than partial salvation through moral conversion or partial recovery through endless subsidy. To be sure, there are extraordinary claims made for the potential of various proposals. Some of these programs are worthy, others not, but most merely probe the edges of real urban change. Whether from Kemp or Clinton, we are immersed in political sophistry at its worst, turnips rhetorically transformed into roses for the benefit of the evening news.

The truth is that, despite the words, there is a broad, tacit acceptance of failure. The reaction to South Central LA brings to mind Gertrude Stein:

"There ain't no answer. There ain't going to be any answer. There never has been an answer. That's the answer. "

But what, if just for a moment, we put aside our fatalism and asked ourselves a different sort of question:

How can we turn South Central LA into a good place to live?

Simply mouthing the words reframes the issue. It is a revolutionary question because, by asking it, we bring the people of South Central LA out of the shadows of stereotypes, statistics and sob stories. We begin to view their problems as we might that of a neighbor rather than that of an abstract crisis to whose amelioration we must dutifully but futilely tithe in the name of doing something.

If we seriously seek to answer this question, the irrelevancy of most of what has been said of late becomes quickly apparent. And we begin to find not only hope, but the way opening towards new ideas and solutions long buried under tons of paper promoting endless replication of past follies.

Twenty-four years ago this spring, I found myself sitting in a smoke-flavored living room watching another city burn: mine. The fires were as close as four blocks away; by the next morning the neighborhood's grocery store, laundry, and liquor store would be gone.

But that was only the first riot. Riots, I found out, always come in pairs. In the first, lasting a few days, the stores are looted of whiskey, TV sets and clothing. In the second riot, lasting a decade or more, the community is looted by land speculators, Trojan Horse politicians with their false promises, and grand plans that speak of change but provide at best the blueprint for restoration of the status quo.

There are lots in Washington, DC, burned empty in 1968, which are still little more than the cemeteries of dreams. There are government centers constructed in the wake of that disaster as symbols of the city's intentions that have been seldom touched since with either paint or adequate funds. One viewing them for the first time would never believe they were once considered part of the cure. And then, elsewhere, one finds the lavish homes built for developers with the profits from the city's failure.

To understand how it might have been different and, in LA, could be different, it helps to start with a few general concepts:

- L.D. Pratt, a DC activist of the 60s, used to say that there was plenty of money in the central city. The problem was it didn't stop there. It just flowed through as in a sewer.

In family income alone, South Central LA generates over $10 billion a year, or about half of the income of Occidental Petroleum. Any plan to rebuild South Central LA must include at its core a redirection of this enormous cash flow.

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The Progressive Review

Bucking the system since 1966

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• Like other inner cities, South Central LA has faced major disparities in the distribution of private and public services. For example, there are at least 75% more people for each supermarket and bank in the area of the uprising than for LA County as a whole, and one-third more people for each manufacturing job. Public discrimination against an inner city can be overt, but it can also be subtle -- as when Washington built a subway system largely for white residents and suburbanites, and left the black DC majority to rely heavily on a second-rate bus system and no easy access to jobs outside the city.

• The people living in a community like South Central LA are mostly normal people in abnormal circumstances. To be sure, such communities have an excess *of* social deviants, but they are deviants of their own community's norms as well as those of America in general. It is one of the most venal libels of our times to assert that the failure of their community is a failure of morality or of courage. Walk down any inner city street and America and you'll find more people with more courage, resilience and integrity than you'll find in your average bank, college administration or office of the Vice President of the United States. These are not folks living on the hidden welfare of old boy networks, sinecures granted by virtue of college degrees, or tenure achieved by election to public office, but people who every day have to face the most extraordinary strains on their dignity and self-respect.

Once, when I was editing a newspaper that served an inner city area, I thought it would be interesting to list all the churches within our 2 square mile circulation area. It took more than two pages, for there were over a hundred. Yet this was a community, we were told even then, that was in the grips of pathology.

• The contention that in such communities there are large numbers of persons who refuse to work is a lie and should be treated as such. The media and even some liberals have bought into this right-wing myth, leading to macabre attempts to remold welfare into a form of punishment or cheap, forced labor. Absent from discussions of workfare, however, is identification of the jobs at which those on assistance refuse to work. This lack can be readily explained: the jobs don't exist. Even for recent college graduates, the job market in many parts of the country is the worst in half a century.

While politicians bleat about the need for education in order to

Vietnam echoes

That ole fool Bush think we as dumb as Saddam. Land Marines in Compton and get hisself re-elected. But this ain't Iraq. This is Vietnam, Jack. -- *Resident of Watts quoted by Mike Davis in the Nation.*

The Vietnam analogy has been hanging over American cities since the beginning of the destructive war on drugs. In recent months, however, it's become more than a metaphor. Bush's weed and seed program (massive anti-drug assaults followed by social programs) seems straight out of the Vietnam case book. And in the May 25 *Newsweek,* Vietnam veteran (turned military commentator) David Hackworth referred to the events in LA as a "two-day war" and proposed a reconstruction corps manned by the military under the command of Gen. Colin Powell. The job of this crew: "to tear down the Third World ghettos and rebuild them into modern cities." What happens if this pacification program works no better than in Vietnam, Hackworth doesn't say.

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get a decent job, our big city school systems continue to deteriorate, because their education can only be as good as the jobs waiting to use it. We have, with considerable consciousness, developed an economic system that can get along quite well without the services of the graduates of our inner city high schools. In fact, 78% of those receiving unemployment compensation in DC in 1990 *had at least* a high school education; 35% had more.

And in this largely black city recently, a job fair was held to offer 500 jobs. Ten thousand people showed up for it. That's roughly equivalent to two-thirds of all the adults in the city on AFDC.

Fifty years ago, FDR faced a critical level of joblessness in the United States. He did not set out to punish the poor for the failure of the American economic system. He did not propose draconian measures against those not clever enough to find non-existent employment. Unlike a surprisingly broad consensus of the current American establishment, he and his administration would have found such posturing ludicrous. Instead he simply proposed that there should be a job for every American who wished to work. And he set about to create those jobs.

With such thoughts in mind, let us turn back to LA. What follows is no "blueprint for survival," no "Marshall Plan," no grandiose scheme concocted so everyone thinks we're doing something. Rather it is a collection of ideas, of varying import, of the sort that could help make South Central LA -- or any inner city community -- a pleasant place to live.

- **Stop using the language of failure:** The first, easiest and cheapest step anyone thinking about the inner cities can take is to eradicate all words like *ghetto, pathology, culture of poverty,* and *permanent underclass* from their vocabulary. These words are powerfully self-fulfilling rhetoric and alibis for indifference, as the past decade has shown. Until we see these communities as real places with real people entitled to the same pursuit of life, liberty and happiness as any other American, we will continue to regard them as targets of triage rather than as an integral part of our society.

- **Do something now.** Fly in some of those prefab buildings the military stockpiles for use in places like Saudi Arabia and start using them as temporary centers for organizing, education, health and commerce. Every day without progress compounds the problem.

Clear the burned-out land and plant it with grass, bushes, and trees. Paint everything that needs it. Lest this sound gratuitously cosmetic, consider this:

In the Bloods/Crips $3.6 billion plan for rebuilding the city. amidst grander proposals, the two gangs wrote:

> All pavements/sidewalks in Los Angeles are in dire need of resurfacing. ..
>
> We want a well-lit neighborhood. All alleys shall be painted white or yellow...
>
> All trees will be properly trimmed and maintained. We want all weeded/shrubbed areas to be cleaned up and properly nurtured. New trees will be planted to increase the beauty of our neighborhoods
>
> All schools shall have new landscaping and more plants and trees around the schools; completely upgrade the bathrooms, making them more modern, provide a bathroom monitor to each bathroom which will provide freshen-up toiletries at a minimum cost to the students...

In other words, start right now to fix up the place. Perhaps greater America enjoys the image of a post-apocalyptic city fostered by film and TV, but the gangs themselves have other ideas.

- **Give the community power.** We try to have it both ways. We deny our inner cities power and then blame them for anarchy. What happened in LA reflects not a poverty of values, but a poverty of power. Watching the '60s poverty program at close hand, one of the most remarkable sights was the way leadership developed as soon as a little money, a little caring and a little authority was finally granted the targeted communities. In my neighborhood, a black ex-coal miner from West Virginia rose to be not only a respected community leader but a significant force in the city as well. Others went on to jobs in business and government. They weren't all admirable, but saints or

The national nannies

There seems to be an odd new assumption that when we elect someone to office, one of their prime functions is to tell us how to behave. Thus, complaining about the "family breakdown" or "moral values" has come to be seen as a reasonable substitute for governmental action, and at least rates as much news coverage. While Dan Quayle is an egregious example, he is no more inclined to play preacher than, say, DC's Democratic mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly. A modest proposal: that the media quote ministers on morality and politicians on politics and not vice versa. This practice is already in effect for other areas of human activity; the media rarely quotes a minister or a politician, for example, on the efficacy of a certain method of open heart surgery. And besides, would you really go to a politician -- or a journalist for that matter -- for advice on how to raise your kid?

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sinners, their community gained power as they did, and that was good.

Just as it is inconceivable to imagine our country rising above social chaos without some form of government, it is equally absurd to think that the problems of the inner city can be ameliorated without some form of government.

While the model of the advisory neighborhood commissions of Washington, DC, are a start, they are only that. Politicians jealous of their own power, prevented these bodies from incorporation, working together with other neighborhoods, and suing the city government.

Real neighborhood government would have such powers and more. Neighborhood governments should be given spending authority over their share of a percentage of the city budget, not only so the neighborhood's priorities are reflected in the city's spending but so, in aggregate, we can begin to see what neighborhoods, as opposed to big city machines, want and need.

Real neighborhood government would have a law enforcement role. These might include a unarmed constabulary to deal with lesser offenses and keeping the peace, and community judicial councils that could deal with lesser transgressions in ways other than imprisonment.

Real neighborhood government should have some of the functions of planning and zoning now so rigorously hoarded by city hall. With neighborhood government, for example, the right to veto building permits and zoning variances could provide leverage to encourage fair employment practices by non-resident business owners.

Further, with the right of incorporation, these governments could begin to design and manage their own economic development programs.

• **Recirculate the money:** Inner city communities suffer severe economic exploitation. Not only does money earned by their residents flow out rapidly, there is little opportunity for capital accumulation. The best way to change this dynamic is to change who controls the economy of the community. While this can be done to a certain extent by helping minority businesses, the 70s and 80s have shown that this often merely created a small cadre of minority capitalists almost as disconnected, economically or morally, from the inner city as their white predecessors. In DC, for example, the vast majority of government contracts for minority businesses have gone to a handful of politically well connected ethnic entrepreneurs.

> According to an aide quoted in the *Washington Post,* the President is very interested in the LA situation: "He really is terrifically engaged in trying to understand these issues and these problems -- as engaged as he was during the gulf. Of course the learning curve is a little steeper."

One of the best alternatives is the cooperative. This middle way between capitalism and socialism has proved good enough for Harvard students and professors as they shop at the Harvard Coop, good enough for the residents of Green Bay who would have long ago lost their football team were it not cooperatively owned, good enough for hundreds of farm communities who depend on their cooperative for vital goods and services, good enough for millions of federal and state workers who bank through cooperative credit unions, and good enough for present and former military officers who enjoy the cheap rates and excellent service of an insurance cooperative that serves them.

But for most of America, the cooperative is an unknown economic form. The media treats it, at best, as a curiosity and, at worst, a step towards communism.

In fact, the cooperative is an eminently well-tested, financially sound and morally grounded economic system. It is premised on the principle that those who buy, those who work and those who own should be the same. Over and again, the cooperative has been a machine communities have used to pull themselves jointly and severally up the economic ladder. And no place is it better suited than in the American inner city.

Cooperatives have been a part of the social experiment before, but never given adequate attention. The New Deal started cooperatives in its new towns. Rural electrification was carried out by cooperatives. And one of the most worthy, though little noted, components of the War on Poverty was the community credit union.

The Watts credit union -- created in the 60s and untouched in the recent revolt -- remains, but its success is so little appreciated that after the uprising, a large corporation sent it two old typewriters and an adding machine, never imagining that the Watts institution was well-computerized. According to the *Washington Post,* the president found the gift "an indignity."

Places like South Central LA need more community credit unions. They need consumer co-ops modeled on the ones that function so well in rural areas. And they need trade cooperatives. Imagine if just a small portion of the sum slated to be blown on the great LA recovery were diverted to creating a construction cooperative, with publicly funded skill training developing the base for a co-op that would play a major role in rebuilding the whole community.

• **End the discrimination against the inner city.** We now have civil rights commissions that deal with cases of discrimination against individuals, but we have yet to develop similar protections for whole neighborhoods. The creation of a neighborhood equalization

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board, with powers similar to that of a human relations commission, could start to change this. Just as we have environmental impact statements for major public and private actions, we need neighborhood impact statements to determine how building a new stadium, or proposed changes in transportation policy affects the various neighborhoods of a city.

Where discrimination is found, we then need some neighborhood affirmative action. Past disparities in public spending should be corrected. Transportation systems that favor some neighborhoods over others need to be redesigned. And differentials in sales and other taxes can be established to lessen inequities and encourage economic development.

- **Think small business:** The emphasis on major development projects and monumental symbols of progress has been a significant contributor to the demise of many cities. In the process, small business -- the real job producer in America, the real glue between commerce and community -- has been badly short-changed. Any sound economic plan for South Central LA will have a major emphasis on small business and small manufacturing.
- **Change the rules:** All the laws and regulations of LA need to be examined to see how they affect communities such as those in South Central LA. The typical city law book is jammed with regulations that, in the name of preventing evil, prevent the good from happening as well. Zoning laws are a typical example, making it hard to provide accessory apartments, take in borders or run a business out of one's house. But small business regulations need to be examined as well, along with rules that work against developing a successful community transportation system (such as classic prohibitions against jitney service).
- **Create money:** The easiest cure for a lack of money is to create it. Such ideas as time dollars, in which people exchange hours instead of cash, have proven successful as has community currency, earnable and spendable in the same neighborhood.
- **Hold on to the land:** One of the biggest mistakes cities made following the riots of the 60s was not to hold on to the land they acquired in the aftermath. Beholden to major real estate interests and anxious to show progress, no matter how unmeaningful, cities sold off land they had gotten at fire sale prices to developers who proceeded to become exceedingly wealthy. This error can be corrected if any land the city buys is either turned over to a community cooperative or is leased to developers, just as an owner of a shopping mall would do. Rents bring in more money than taxes, which is one reason why developers are rich and cities go broke.
- **Grow things:** Beyond improving the ambiance of the place, there is in South Central LA the opportunity to create a more self-sustainable community and a more ecologically sound one. For a city as import-dependent as LA, this is an opportunity that should not be missed. Any plan for South Central LA should include an analysis of what can be grown there as well as what can be built there. In addition, the LA revolt has opened up land that could be used either temporarily or permanently for farmers's markets of the sort that every city needs in abundance.
- **Use new ideas.** There has been an explosion of new thinking about cities in recent years. To take just one example, the co-housing movement -- with its price-lowering and community-building homes with common facilities -- has considerable potential for South Central LA. There are urban ecologists, new thinkers, new books, architects and anthropologists who have much to offer.

Such thinking should be central to the reconstruction of LA rather than pushed to the periphery by the very conventional thinking and outmoded urban design that helped to create the LA revolt in the first place.

In the end, it is the community itself, and not the politicians, not journalists throwing out a few ideas, and not Peter Ueberroth, who will rebuild South Central LA. All can help or hurt, and a good deal of money and assistance is clearly needed. But the money is only as good as what it is used for and communities can't be built from the outside. Communities come from within. We can share thoughts, dollars and time but unless South Central LA itself is allowed to reconstruct itself it won't happen. One already senses that forces far larger than that community are circling it with promises and policies that seem to do more for their own interests than for the people supposedly being helped. The second great LA riot is already on. It didn't work in the 60s and it won't work now. -- *Sam Smith*

The Statehood Papers

Your editor, who wrote the first article outlining the case for DC statehood and was a founding member of the DC statehood movement, has collated various articles on the subject written over the past 20 years. These pieces give not only a history of the movement, but arguments for DC statehood as well as aid and comfort to those who might be interested in starting a new state themselves.

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The deconstruction of America (cont'd)

Thomas S. Martin

• *Nearly one-third of the American electorate is prepared to vote this November for a Texas billionaire with no credentials, no apparent strategy for solving the nation's problems, and questionable business ethics.*

• *Although the verdict in the Rodney King case should have surprised no one who was paying attention to the trial, Los Angeles exploded in the worst race riots in two decades when the LAPD officers were found not guilty.*

• *The Mohawk Indian nation now issues its own passports, the Lakota have declared sovereignty, the Catawba are suing hundreds of home owners for recovery of stolen lands.*

• *More parents every year pull their children out of public schools -- not to enroll them in private academies, but to educate them at home.*

• *Voter turnout has been dropping steadily since the early seventies, with no end in sight.*

• *Tired of waiting for police who never come, vigilante groups in cities all over America have organized to banish crack houses, prostitutes and youth gangs from their urban neighborhoods. In San Francisco, Queer Nation was forced to organize its own Street Patrol because the authorities display little interest in gay-bashing crimes.*

• *Green Party candidates will be on the ballot this fall in at least three states, probably more.*

• *In defiance of traditional law and culture, the people of Takoma Park, Maryland recently gave resident aliens the right to vote in municipal elections.*

• *Our nearest neighbor country and major trading partner is about to break up like Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union.*

• *Ozarkia, Cascade, Superior, Alta California, New Columbia -- if a growing number of dissatisfied under-represented Americans get their way, these will be the names of our five newest states.*

• *Many New Yorkers now buy fresh vegetables and fruit, not from grocery chain stores, but from farmers' markets. One hundred forty small farms, many of them organic, are producing food for local consumption within sight of the World Trade Center towers.*

Question: what do all these anomalous developments have in common?

Answer: they all represent the devolution of political and economic power in the United States.

The disintegrative process is not gradual; in fact it is happening so rapidly that few Americans yet recognize the trend for what it really is. Effectively disguised by our mass-media, mass-consumption artificial national culture, the deconstruction of the United States proceeds apace. Since I wrote about the subject in this space a year ago, disillusionment with federal and state government has induced many of us -- perhaps a majority -- to turn away from Big Brother in a search for alternate solutions. Many of these new ideas are unworkable or even dangerous, but their extraordinary variety and creativity mean good news for American democracy and bad news for the politically autistic custodians of the marble mausolea inside the Beltway.

In 1982 President Ronald Reagan announced the "New Federalism," a scheme to devolve money and power from a bloated Washington bureaucracy back to the state and local level. Half of that policy has been carried out: massive cuts in federal subsidies have affected every state, city, college, and public service agency in the country, but very little authority has been devolved to the local level. As a result, our cities are dysfunctional: Los Angeles after the King verdict was but the tip of an iceberg. Schools and universities must raise tuition and cut programs; high school graduates cannot read and college seniors know little about the world they are entering. The bad news goes on, endlessly, reported with a kind of self-righteous *Schadenfreude* by the mainstream press. If we look a little deeper, however, and through different lenses, much of what appears to be bad news is actually positive. Consider the programs we would lose if American tax collection and expenditure were devolved to the local or regional level. The monstrously expensive and remarkably useless space program would have to go. So would the "defense" budget. The Bureau of Indian Affairs would have to cease its paternalistic interference with the lives of native Americans. Ronald Reagan may not have understood just what he was giving his imprimatur to a decade ago.

Consider the several intrastate secession movements now under way -- scarcely reported in the national news, but a matter of great concern to the people involved. Tired of being neglected by their governors and legislatures, many residents of poor or thinly populated regions are campaigning for smaller and more responsive states. Counties in rural Missouri and Arkansas have proposed a new "Ozarkia," its boundaries to be determined by bioregional rather than geopolitical criteria. Residents of northern California have long resented the more ethnically diverse folks down beyond Modesto, and they are now thinking seriously of secession before their rivers are drained dry and their forests gone. The Upper Peninsula is a different world from the rest of Michigan, and is increasingly restive at being

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forced into policies designed for Detroit or Flint. And the readers of this journal know quite well why the District of Columbia needs statehood. Separatism within states is nothing new, but the establishment would prefer that we not know about it, except when it is linked with indefensible practices like slavery. Our history books tell us all about the Confederacy, but nothing about Watauga, Vandalia, Deseret or Neosho. Creating new states to escape the abuses of old ones may seem like trading Coke for Pepsi, but it is a step in the right direction.

Deconstruction has progressed a great deal further among Native Americans. The Mohawk nation at Akwesasne has long conducted business as a quasi-independent state, and the Lakota are not far behind. Recently the Rosebud reservation council ordered a new Indiocentric curriculum for its schools, an essential step toward Lakota sovereignty. Meanwhile, federal court cases involving Indians become more bizarre every year. In January, Chief Homer St. Francis of Vermont's Abenaki nation went on trial for "false swearing," a charge which can bring up to fifteen years in prison. His crime? Failing to report ownership of a few acres of tribal land. Like most native traditionalists, Chief St. Francis does not believe that land can be "owned." His tribe has charged the state of Vermont with violating several treaties and the United Nations ban on genocide. Since the Abenaki recognize all species as their brothers and sisters, they claim that the destruction of wildlife on their land is equivalent to genocide. The Abenaki tribal court, which is recognized by federal law, has subpoenaed every elected official in the state. At this writing, all have failed to appear. And a few months ago, the Zuni people of New Mexico invested a $17 million court award in the "Zuni Sustainable Development Plan." Rather than divvy up the cash, or build a bingo hall, they will restore the agricultural productivity of their land and use it to escape from the wage slavery of Anglo civilization.

Political devolution movements in the United States range across the spectrum from Hispanics in New Mexico to bioregionalists in Maine, but all have at least one worry in common: the degradation of their environments by big government, big business or both. All understand that the key to ecological sanity is local control. Many such movements evolved out of coalitions formed to fight toxic waste dumps or the strip-mining of tribal lands. Grassroots activists have learned that the social, political, economic and even religious forces that govern America are interlocking and mutually sustaining, and that their unanimous purpose is to make us all homogeneous and interchangeable components of the capitalist machine. The establishment has come a long way toward achieving that Orwellian goal, but it will go no further: it has run up against a wall of resistance, the proverbial "we're mad as hell and we're not gonna take it any more." Aside from the practical consequences of this critical event in our history, we need to understand the tectonic forces that underlie the surface effects.

Since the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* thirty years ago, it has become fashionable to call every cultural tremor a "paradigm shift."

The term has been abused to the point of fatuity, so much so that we often fail to realize that a truly momentous paradigm shift -- the Big One -- actually is occurring. The underpinnings of western civilization are being knocked away one by one, among them the abnormalities known as "sovereignty," "hierarchy" and the "nation-state." The first sign of a paradigm breakdown is "incommensurability," or the inability of proponents on two sides of an issue to comprehend each other's language. Even the most cursory glance at today's news will reveal that we are deep in an incommensurability crisis. George Bush and Rodney King mean something entirely different when they say that the Simi Valley verdict is "not the end" of that issue. And what on earth does Mr. Bush mean when he calls himself the "education president" or the "environmental president?" What, indeed, do 80% of all Americans mean when they call themselves "environmentalists?" Most of the key words in our social, political and economic vocabularies no longer have generally accepted meanings.

Opponents of American devolution have grown increasingly shrill in the past year. They have (amazingly) promoted the Gulf War, not merely as a crusade for democracy in Kuwait or even for oil, but as a panacea for declining American patriotism. They are campaigning to instate English as the official language of the United States. In desperation, they disparage the multicultural project in language that reveals the true depths of the incommensurability crisis: multi-culturalism is an attempt, they report with shock and sorrow, to undermine the foundations of western civilization!

According to Kuhn, "Paradigms gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that a group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute." The modern post-industrial world has more than a few problems, and the group recognizing them as "acute" is now approaching a majority of the population. Old habits die hard; human nature is understandably wary of leaps into the dark, and will try desperately to stretch the old paradigm to cover new and alien crises -- as when Ozarkians or Alta Californians try to convince themselves that calamities inflicted on them by one state government can be rectified by another. This sort of naiveté is, fortunately, on the wane. In the coming century the United States,

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deconstructed and (one hopes) reconstructed, will be a fundamentally different place. The emerging new paradigm will stress decentralism, participatory democracy, ecological humanism, rejection of racial and sexual intolerance, social justice and responsibility. Greens, democratic socialists and other radicals who support this vision of a libertarian future emphasize the degree of struggle and sacrifice required to achieve it. But in reality the devolutionary project is far advanced already, as ordinary people unconcerned with ideology build the new society within the dead shell of the old.

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The Weather Report

Cold confusion

You may recall the flurry of stories three years ago about that miracle of physics, cold fusion, that turned out, we were told, to be a flop, if not a scientific fraud.

That's where the American media left us, but in the process may be missing one of the biggest stories of our time.

Cold fusion is a phenomenon that some researchers believe occurs when a special form of hydrogen interacts with certain metals. It is argued that this interaction releases quantities of energy far beyond that occurring in an ordinary chemical reaction. And it does so with little radiation and potentially at very little expense.

Despite an American media blackout on the subject, there are at present some 200 scientists around the world actively studying cold fusion. The Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif., which does research for the electric utilities, has spent $2 million on cold fusion research since 1989 and budgeted another $3 million to be spent in 1992.

On January 27, top cold fusion researchers gathered in Nagoya, Japan, to hear a series of reports on cold fusion projects. Major Japanese newspaper covered the event.

The Japanese, it is estimated, are spending $10-$15 million a year on cold fusion research and the leading journal *Bungeishunju* says that cold fusion "is no longer open to discussion. Cold fusion experiments and replication left those levels of doubt a long time ago, and entered a more concrete stage of development. Anyone who still says, 'such nonsense, it can't be!' is simply not looking at reality.

Meanwhile, in the United States, no federal or state money is being spent on cold fusion and as recently as last November *The Washington Post* ran a review by the director of the American Physical Society that attacked the cold fusionists with less than scientific reserve:

> If everyone knows it is wrong, why are they doing it? Inept scientists whose reputations would be tarnished, greedy administrators.... gullible politicians who had squandered the taxpayers' dollars, lazy journalists... --- all had an interest in making it appear that the issue had not been settled. Their easy corruption was one of the most chilling aspects of this sad comedy. To be sure, there are true believers among the cold-fusion acolytes, just as there are sincere scientists who believe in psychokinesis, flying saucers, creationism and the Chicago Cubs. A Phd in sciences in not inoculation against foolishness. -- or mendacity.

When Jed Rothwell, who heads Cold Fusion Research Advocates, asked the editor of *Scientific American* why his journal had not covered the cold fusion story, he described it as "pathological science" with no merit whatsoever.

Yet the Japanese version of the same publication ran a two-page story in March. And the signers of a petition to Congress to hold hearings on the matter include the names of a Nobel Laureate in physics; scientists from MIT, Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, Tufts, the US Army, Rockwell, Dow, and Motorola; the chair of the atomic energy commission of India, and leading scientists in Japan, China and Russia.

Will cold fusion pan out? Who knows? But the indifference of the media, Congress and the Bush administration to an idea that is being treated seriously in as serious a country as Japan, that even has attracted the attention of the American utility industry, seems strange at best. At worst, it could provide highly dramatic evidence that America's genius for invention and discovery is well on the wane.

Just politics

As of June 1, recent polls showed Bush leading in states with 185 electoral votes, Perot in states with 143 electoral votes and Clinton in two (DC and Arkansas) with nine electoral votes.

According to the *Washington Times*, at this point in 1988, Dukakis was ahead in states with over 300 electoral votes.

In short, by sticking with Clinton, the Democrats are on their way to a major electoral disaster that could surpass even the failure of McGovern and Mondale. The big difference with the Clinton campaign is that the party leadership has the bad news in plenty of time to do something about it.

We note that Bill Clinton is still running into questions about his evasion of the draft. Perhaps he should have quoted British scholar Heathcote William Gerard, who when criticized for failing to participate in the Great War said: "I am the civilization they are fighting to defend."

Those tempted by Ross Perot

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might want to keep in mind his comment to the editors of the *Dallas Times Herald* that police should be allowed to conduct house-to-house searches for drugs and weapons. Although the story was published in 1988, Perot never challenged it until recently when he accused the author of "flights of fancy."

Over the coming months we can expect attacks on everything from 80-year-old welfare programs supposedly dreamed up by the liberals in the 1960s to the national register of historic places (an alleged affront on property values). Whenever we hear such piffle, it brings to mind the story of the fellow who went to college on the GI bill and then bought his first house with a VA loan. When the hurricane struck he got federal disaster aid. When he got sick he was treated at a veteran's hospital. When he was laid off he received unemployment insurance and then used an SBA loan to start his own business, with his funds secured at a local bank under federal deposit insurance laws. Now he's retired -- on social security and Medicare -- and so the other day he got in his car, drove on a federal interstate to the railroad station, boarded Amtrak and came to Washington to ask his congressman to get the government off his back.

The pleas of this journal and others for the Democratic Party to come to its senses and nominate someone other than Clinton seeming to be to no avail, our thinking has turned to offering aid and comfort to the millions who will vote for Clinton with shame and misery. Such as bumper stickers for unhappy Democrats. Some initial suggestions are below; other ideas are welcome:

BUT BUSH & PEROT ARE WORSE

ANOTHER DEMOCRAT RELUCTANTLY FOR CLINTON

VOTE DEMOCRATIC ANYWAY

Land of the free

The federal government appears intent on putting the Christic Institute out of business. The Institute, perhaps best known for its work on he Karen Silkwood case and its later investigations of the Iran-Contra enterprise, was hit with an extraordinary fine by a federal judge for bringing a law suit against more than a dozen key figures in the Iran-Contra scandal. The judge, four days before the matter came to trial, ruled that the case was "frivolous" and socked the Institute with a $1.2 million fine. Of course, later developments have shown that Christic -- although even some of its supporters say its legal case was flawed -- was on to one of the biggest scandals in America's history.

Now the regional office of the IRS has recommended revoking Christic's tax-exempt status. A group of right-wing members of Congress have also urged the revocation, accusing the Institute of "legal terrorism."

The attack on Christic could be the opening wedge in a Bush administration move against other progressive organizations with tax exempt status. Contributions can be sent to the institute at 1324 North Capitol Street NW, DC 20002.

The Michigan Court of Appeals has ruled that sobriety roadblocks are a violation of the state constitution. Said the majority of the three-judge court: "We do not believe the proposed elimination of Michigan citizens' rights to be free from suspicionless seizure a proper response to the problem [of drunken driving.]"

US District Court judge Harold Greene has barred the Pentagon from asking some civilian employees about their arrests, financial status and past drug use as a condition of their security clearance. Greene ruled that these questions violated not only the Privacy Act but constitutional rights of free speech, association and process.

Feedback

• In response to several articles appearing in the *Review,* we have received a number of letters from readers who have run afoul of this nation's draconian drug laws. The letters are uniformly rational and thoughtful but somewhere in the letter, often as a passing reference, is a reminder that this is far more than a sterile policy debate, as when W. Max Godby of Berne, NY notes that "I will be going into court in Maryland within a few weeks (cultivation of cannabis)." Godby finds our proposals "well-reasoned and compelling" but adds, "sad to say, reason is not as yet able to make itself heard over the hysteria

Blatant Self-Promotion

The Progressive Review has been named as a finalist in two categories for the Fourth Annual Alternative Press Awards: (1) best publication under 15,000 circulation and (2) coverage of emerging issues. The awards are sponsored by the *Utne Reader*, a review of the alternative press.

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of the drug witch hunt."

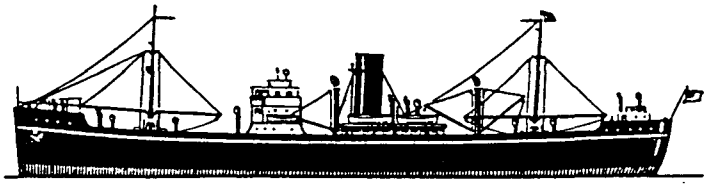
• Our piece on entropy continues to provoke comment. You will recall that last month we learned from a reader that entropy is lumpy and can be exported out of a "dissipative structure." Now Ron Zucker of Washington says our science is lousy and notes that entropy only occurs in a closed system and that politics is not a closed system. Presumably he was speaking generically and not of the rules for nomination by the Democratic Party.

One anonymous reader even sent us an unsigned article in a plain brown wrapper. The article appeared originally in *Christianity and Crisis* on August 18, 1980 and was titled "The 1980 Campaign: Politics as Entropy," thus scooping the *Review* by 12 years. The article points out that the French philosopher-poet, Charles Peguy, thought that the contradictions and the intellectual and moral disorder of the first decades of this century were due to the "devil's evil." The devil, according to Peguy, did not weaken or pervert human will, but clouded the human intellect, or what we referred to as global dumbing.

The article further notes that John Ahearn of Stanford University described the graduating class of 1979 as having "little sense of the present," "no goal" and no "path of effective action." He did not say that the devil made them do it, but rather that their problem was entropy. Entropy, he claimed, rules the universe.

Your editor wrote the piece to make a modest point and gain a modest laugh, probably in reverse order. Little did he know the size and eloquence of the entropy community ready to pounce on the unwary neophyte.

• A gentleman in Johnstown, Pa., sends us his business card on which he offers, among other things, to help us "declassify the knowledge of decoding the brainstem response signal for language to communicate." On the back, in 7 point type, he maintains that "our federal government implanted a multicomponent microstructed electronic device... I am decoded. They know what I am thinking." It's comforting to realize that George Bush is in touch with someone out there.



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